

Time to Celebrate: It's Purim

This is by far *the* most fun and festive weekend of the year, in Israel. It's Purim!

How does one describe Purim in Israel? It's a combination of Halloween, Mardi Gras and New Year's Eve, all rolled into one.

It's a time for dressing up in costumes, having parties, carnivals, street festivals, and unfortunately a time for excessive drinking.

In fact the ultra-orthodox Jews believe it is commanded in the Bible to drink so much that you get (literally) fall-down drunk.

What Is Purim?

Purim is the celebration of the survival of the Jewish people (again) as described in the biblical book of Esther.

Esther tells the story of the evil Haman who was the right-hand man to the King of Persia. He hated the Jews and, like his successor, the current President of Iran, he wanted to wipe the Jews off the map.

But God had other plans. He strategically placed a Jewish woman in the palace, as the Queen of Persia! Esther was chosen by the earthly king for her beauty. But she was chosen by the heavenly King for her character.

"And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

"Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!'" (Esth. 4:13-16)

As Haman's plot to kill all the Jews moved forward, behind the scenes Esther and her uncle Mordecai were making plans of their own. Mordecai challenged Esther to see that she was in the position of influence for just this reason—to save her people. And save them she did.

After appealing to the king, the Jews were spared, and it was Haman instead who was killed.

This weekend in Israel, the most popular Purim-related food, is a triangle-shaped cookie called a *hamantaschen*. In Hebrew it's literally called a 'Haman's ear' cookie. And as the story of Esther is read in synagogues around the world, each time Haman's name is mentioned, people shake noisemakers to drown out the sound of his name.

Why the Parties?

"And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. So the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them, because Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to annihilate them, and had cast Pur (that is, the lot), to consume them and destroy them; but when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letter that this wicked plot which Haman had devised against the Jews should

return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. So they called these days Purim, after the name Pur" (Esth. 9:20-26).

Many Jews, especially in Israel, take this passage very, very literally. With a special emphasis on "making them days of feasting and joy." Thus the celebrations.

But for kids, it's a lot of fun. They love to dress up and have parties in school.

Messianic Jewish congregations, like Tiferet Yeshua (which is funded by Maoz) will also hold purim parties. On this blog page, you'll see photos of our team setting up at the congregation, by hanging decorations and getting ready for all the fun.

Indeed Purim should be a time to celebrate and to thank God for delivering the Jewish people once again. It takes on special importance in these days as Iran (formerly known as Persia) is once again threatening to destroy Israel. Clearly they learned nothing from their ancestor Haman.

Let's pray that Israel will learn from our foreparents, namely Esther and Mordecai, and that we will turn our faces back towards God, and put our trust in Him and Him alone.

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